



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## SOME AFRICAN FOLK LORE

DR. J. D. MOODY.

Dr. Silas F. Johnson, a young physician of our city, has been laboring for several years as a medical missionary in Western Africa.

Being now at home on a vacation, I have taken advantage of the fact and have spent considerable time with him, gathering facts about African folk-lore and superstitions. Two of these stories which I give, I believe have not before been recorded, at least in relation to these people.

Dr. Johnson's work has been among the Bule tribe, a member of the Fan branch of the great Bantu family of Central and Southern Africa.

Just south of the Sahara Desert is a wide strip of a fertile and densely-populated country, stretching clear across the continent. The central and eastern portion of this territory is called the Sudan. The Fan family occupy the southwestern portion of this region, and the Bule tribe the extreme western portion of this part, near the coast. This lies within German territory, Batanga being the seaport for this region. This is about the northern limit of the Bantu race.

Whether there is a migration now going on towards the south from the eastern portion of the country, I am unable to say, but the Fan branch of this family have been pushing to the west for a long time, the outposts being occupied by the Bules. These are slowly but surely dispossessing the coast people of their ancestral homes. These people, the Bules, in talking about the old times, their traditions, which are few and recent, or about their God, always refer to the East. Some of the old people can remember the last station they occupied to the east of their present location. Among all this great Bantu family certain folk-lore is common property. Much of it suggests contact with the white race in the past, and much of it is of a nature common to themselves and

all aboriginal peoples. The Bules have scarcely any history or any traditions, but they have an interminable number of folk-lore stories having for their central interest the cunning of some animal as displayed in its contests with other animals. The tortoise, the leopard, the python and the monkey family are almost exclusively so used. The tortoise is always the wise one. The fables generally have for their climax the overreaching cunning of this slow creature. Aesop's fable of the hare and tortoise has a singular interest in the light of these stories.

The people delight in these stories. They will gather about a log fire at night, or in their palaver house and listen for hours to their story teller going over his narrative. These stories have no element of history in them, but are fables pure and simple. The reciter will act out the story as he goes along with appropriate gestures. When the climax is reached the interest is gone and the story abruptly ends.

A favorite story is that of the leopard and tortoise, and runs in this wise: Once upon a time the leopard and the tortoise, being together, became very hungry. The tortoise said to the leopard, "let us kill our mothers and eat them." The leopard readily agreed to this, and they further agreed to get their mothers in the morning and kill them and eat them for breakfast. The tortoise that same night gathered a basketful of a fruit of that region which contains a blood-red juice, and took it to a stream and hid it among the bushes on the banks. The next morning they took their mothers to this stream. The tortoise proposed to take his mother up stream a little ways, and that the leopard should take his down stream a little ways and then each kill their mother and have a feast. They each took their stations. The tortoise then took a club and pounded on a log as hard as he could, then taking his basket of fruit, he squeezed the juice into the water, which, running down stream, looked like bloody water. The leopard in the meanwhile waited before killing his mother to see whether the tortoise would carry out his part of the compact or not. Hearing the pounding and seeing the bloody water floating by, he thought the tortoise was surely doing his part, so he took a club and killed his mother. The tortoise in the meanwhile had sent his mother home

by a roundabout way, and now went down to the leopard and helped him devour his mother.

In this story the subterfuges of the tortoise are so transparent that none but the most childish mind would find any interest in it, and it shows something of the childish or childlike workings of the savage mind.

The Bule has no conception of a deity in our sense of God, but they refer to a being whom they call Zambe, who lives far back in the interior. They believe that Zambe made all things, that he has all power, that he is a spirit, and yet while referring him to the interior, that he has no location. They do not think that Zambe has any supervision over their daily lives here or in the future state. They also believe him to have two sons, who also have all power, one living in the interior of Africa and the other in the white man's country. The African one catches elephants and gets ivory and manufactures articles of commerce and trades them to his brother in the white man's country; and he in turn manufactures goods and trades them to his African brother. This seems to be their idea of the origin of trade. They see that articles, manufactured they know not how nor where, pass through their lands. Some one being must have been the guiding force in their making, and this being they call Zambe. As it is evident to them that there are two distinct classes of goods made, they reason that there must have been more than one maker, so they take refuge in two sons as the respective makers.

They believe that there is a town of ghosts down under the ground—probably from the fact of burial in the ground. They believe that at death they will go to this town and that they will see their fathers and all their people there; that they will be living in villages just as in this life, and that the same moral conditions exist there as here. If a spirit does wrong there it will be "caused to die from there," as they quaintly express it, meaning that it will leave this ghost town, and that one of two things will happen to it, either it will become a chimpanzee or some such animal, or else go to a place the name of which means total extinction. As they express it, "he is all gone, there is nothing more of him." Then if an animal which is a transformed spirit, is killed, it, too, goes to this place of extinction.

Another fable gives their idea of the origin of man's superiority to the rest of the animal creation.

It is as follows: Zambe lived back in the interior of the country. One day he called to him man, dwarf—(The Bula consider the dwarf The men will, however, occasionally take a dwarf woman for a wife)—gorilla, chimpanzee, and monkey.

Zambe gave to each one one of their large garden baskets, and in each basket he put seeds of various kinds of vegetables and cuttings of food plants, also an ax, a cutlass and fire, and sent them forth in the world to start homes for themselves. On parting with them he gave such advice as a father would to his sons under similar circumstances.

They started out along the forest path, probably going towards the coast. As they went along the monkey, becoming hungry, plucked some berries or nuts from the bushes by the side of the path. These tasted so good to him that he dropped his basket with its contents, and wandered off into the forest eating what he could find. The others in the meantime went on their way. Soon the chimpanzee became hungry. Gathering some nuts and eating them, he was so well satisfied that he too dropped his basket and went off into the forest, while the others went on. The gorilla was the next to become hungry, and, seeing some fruit growing on the trees near by, plucked and ate it. He too seemed satisfied with this food, and, dropping his basket, wandered off into the forest.

The dwarf saw some bees going into a hole in a tree. He climbed the tree, got the honey and ate it. The taste of it pleased him so well that, looking around and seeing a snail on a tree, knocked it off and ate it also.

(There is a species of land snail in that country, as large as a small plate, which, instead of living in its shell, carries a small conical spiral shell on its back. These snails attach themselves to trees and the natives knock them off and eat them. They make implements out of the shells.)

He was so pleased with these foods that he stopped by the side of the path, took the coals of fire out of his basket and kindled a fire. Then holding the shell in the fire the flesh was easily detached. He then rolled it up tightly in a leaf, and after roasting it in the fire, ate it. He thought the snail and the honey good enough for him, so he left the basket, ax, cutlass and seeds, only taking the fire, and went off into the forest.

Only man was left. Coming to a pretty stream where the soil looked good, he built a shelter, began to clear the forest, burning the brush when dried, and planted the seeds. While the crops were growing he got some bark and built himself a hut.

After a time Zambe started out to look after these children of his and to see how they were getting along. He found the baskets one after another just where they had been dropped. He bewailed the folly of those he had sent out, saying they were not of his children. He went until he came to man's village. He was greatly pleased thereat, and said: "Yes, this man is my child," and ever since man has been Zambe's child.

Dr. Johnson was showing how to make a "cat's cradle" with a string when one of the boys took it and made a great many different kinds, such as the doctor had never seen.

Alfred Wallace makes a similar statement in regard to the children in Borneo.

The natives have a singular game played with tops. They cut off the end of the snail shell, spoken of before, making it about an inch and a half long. One man will lay his top on the hard-beaten ground; another man will take his station a few feet away, and, holding his top with the fingers, with the point in the hollow of the hand, then giving a throwing motion of the arm, together with a peculiar twist of the fingers, he sends it spinning along the ground like a top towards the other one, which, if it touches, he claims as his own.

The rainbow by them is regarded as a huge python; when one appears they at once begin to attack it with guns and bows.